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ABSTRACT

Suggestions for the successful implementation of a needs analysis for faculty/staff development are presented, based upon the experiences of a consortium of four South Carolina technical colleges. The report first defines a needs assessment as a process to determine the difference between what exists and what is needed, and then presents a five-point rationale for conducting a needs assessment which focuses on planning requirements and the problems involved in serving the changing needs of two-year college students in the face of a declining faculty turnover rate. The advantages and disadvantages of three methods for conducting a needs assessment are then discussed, including the nominal group technique and the modified Delphi technique--which enable small groups to develop a prioritized list of staff development needs--and surveys. A discussion of the following seven factors in the use of surveys in needs assessment is then presented: (1) development of survey objectives; (2) selection of the type of survey instrument to be used; (3) development and testing of the questionnaire--this section includes a list of the types of questions that can be asked and the subject areas into which they can be grouped; (4) administration of the questionnaire; (5) diagnosis of the data; (6) utilization of the data; and (7) evaluation of the survey's accuracy. (JP)

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CONDUCTING A NEEDS ANALYSIS FOR FACULTY AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

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I. Introduction

A. Warm-up

It is a pleasure and honor to be asked to share with you my experience with the development, implementation, and use of a college-wide needs assessment. This survey was part of a consortium activity involving Sumter Area Technical College, Sumter, South Carolina; Florence-Darlington Technical College, Florence, South Carolina; Chesterfield-Marlboro Technical College, Cheraw, South Carolina; and Williamsburg Technical College, Kingstree, South Carolina. These four schools had started in fall, 1978 an informal consortium to work together in Faculty and Staff Development. This survey was one of the first activities.

The survey of these colleges was done in May of 1979. It was developed using most of the guidelines I will describe, and was a joint effort to assess the faculty and staff development needs of the four colleges involved. Through the able assistance of the State Office, we were able to receive a detailed analysis of the data for both the consortium and each individual college. The data has been used at Sumter TEC in planning FSD activities for this year. Also, regional NISOD workshops for these four schools will be based on this data. I will refer to our actual experiences in the development and use of this needs assessment at points in my presentation.

B. Outline of Presentation

I would like to discuss the topic of "needs assessment" in three areas. Those are detailed in three questions.

1. What is a "needs assessment"?

2. Why do a "needs assessment"?

3. How do I carry out a "needs assessment"?

II. What is a "Needs Assessment"

A. General

Most authorities agree that assessment is an essential part of any planning process. This applies directly to the planning and implementation of a FSD program.

B. Definition

Just what is a needs assessment? Well a need has been defined as a deficiency, something lacking, or a discrepancy. That is the difference between what is and what should be or what is desired. Therefore, a formal needs assessment is the process of determining the difference or gap between where one is and where one wants to be or should be. The magnitude of the gap should also be included in the process.

To do this correctly, a formal measurement is required. There are several ways to do this. These will be discussed under the How question.

III. Why do a "Needs Assessment"?

There are at least five reasons:

The first can be discussed as a

1. trip analogy: Where we are

How we are going

How do we know when we get there

The second concerns

2. The diverse backgrounds with regard to college

faculty which mean diverse skills and therefore needs such as age, education/training level, experience, teaching skills, interpersonal skills, etc.

The third concerns

3. Diverse student backgrounds with regard to age, goals, ability, motivation.

4. The change process itself is a fourth "why". We all resist change to one degree or another. Many people will view a comprehensive FSD program as an attempt to change them. They are correct in that it is an attempt to strengthen and improve the educational process and all activities associated with it. Because of this, many will view it with skepticism. By involvement at the beginning, some of this should dissipate. Also, by directing subsequent activities at stated needs, the programs will be more acceptable.

5. Turnover or a lack of turnover is the fifth "why". During the coming years faculty turnover will be minimal (as it has been in SC for many years in most colleges) we need to remember two quotes from Dr. O'Banion's writings.

    ----"As the 60's focused on pre-service programs, the 70's and 80's must focus on in-service activities."

    ----"The quality of instruction in the two-year college depends primarily on the quality of the staff".

These statements vividly point out why we need a FSD program and a vital integral and required part of a quality FSD program in a "needs assessment".

We have seen what a "needs assessment" is and why we should do one. Now lets look at How.

IV. How to do a Needs Assessment

A. Methodology

There are several ways to do a needs assessment. These include administrative determination, studies done at similar institutions, direct observation by some group and personal interviews. The disadvantages of the first two are obvious. The latter two have advantages of gaining information, but require trained personnel and a great deal of time. There are three other processes which I recommend for consideration. These are: Nominal Group Technique

Modified Delphi Technique

Survey

1. Nominal Group Technique

The nominal group process begins by presenting a group of from seven to nine individuals with a question. An appropriate question for a nominal group needs assessment might refer to staff development needs.

The group members write brief statements or phrases regarding their ideas about the question and/or select needs statements from a lengthy list of possibilities. After the group has had ample time to write its ideas, each member of the group suggests one idea in turn. The

group leader writes the idea on a blackboard or on newsprint until all ideas have been expressed. Next, the group members go over the list, clarify the meaning of items, and eliminate duplications. Then, each individual rank orders a specific number of these items on a set of 3 x 5 cards. The total group priority rating for each item is then computed. A listing of staff development needs is now available.

Advantages: All possible ideas regarding needs should be generated. This is a quick process and avoids the possibility of the group being dominated by one person because each person has an equal opportunity to present ideas. Moreover, it provides a comfortable atmosphere for clarification of stated needs and by obtaining individual priority ratings, it helps eliminate social pressure toward consensus.

Disadvantages: In order to apply the technique to larger groups of people, extra training is required. Also, the process requires a feeling of trust among the individuals in order to achieve the openness needed for mutual sharing.

2. Modified Delphi Method

Description: In a modified form of the Delphi method, the first step is to identify those whose needs are to be assessed. Once that group is established, Members of the group (or a sample if the group is too large) are asked to list their most urgent professional

development needs. Whoever is conducting the assessment then makes a composite list of all the needs identified by the group, eliminating any duplications. The list is sent to each person in the group with directions to rate each item in each of three areas on a four-point scale. The three areas associated with each need are the importance of the need to job performance, the urgency of the need, and the frequency with which the need occurs.

The needs assessor makes a group tabulation of the data and returns the tabulations, together with their individual ratings, once again to the members of the group. At this point, the members are given the opportunity to re-assess their own responses in view of the responses of the total group and make changes in their individual ratings. After this last rating is returned, a final group tabulation is computed.

Advantages: There is a greater involvement of individuals in the assessment of their needs as compared to some other methods. The final form of needs is likely to be rather refined and precise, and the information regarding the importance, urgency, and frequency should facilitate planning efforts.

Disadvantages: Depending on who is responsible for staff development and how much time is available for the planning process, the time and effort needed for the computation and tabulation of the data could become pro-

hibitive. Those individuals who are having their needs assessed must also be willing to devote the time to completing the forms so that the whole process may not get bogged down. By asking people to respond three times the process may be considered too lengthy.

3. Survey

Description: The survey is usually a pencil and paper instrument consisting of one or more pages. It usually presents a list of possible topics or need areas to which the individual is to respond according to his level of interest or need.

Advantages: The survey is usually easy to administer and insures the involvement of those for whom the staff developed program will be designed.

Disadvantages: Depending on the design of the survey, it could be difficult to either tabulate or interpret. General resistance to questionnaires could present a problem in that the results may not be representative of the group if the rate of return is low.

We looked at these and decided that for the information needed, expertise available, and time involved, that a survey was the best method to conduct our needs assessment. From that experience and studying what others have done, I would recommend the survey.

There are seven basic steps in conducting a needs assessment by the survey method. I would like to spend the remainder of this hour discussing with you these seven steps.

These steps are:

1. Development of Purpose & Objectives
2. Selection of the type of assessment instrument
3. Development of Questionnaire
4. Administration of Questionnaire
5. Diagnosis of Data
6. Development of Plan/Use of Data
7. Evaluation

1. Purpose/Objective

A. General

There must be an overall purpose for conducting a survey and objectives we hope to accomplish. I believe three objectives must be included in the development of any activity. These are in ascending order of importance.

1. Measure the strength of the faculty/staff. This not only will possibly eliminate areas of skill training, but will identify faculty/staff with areas of expertise that may be useful in working with others in the FSD program.

2. Provide general and overall direction of a FSD program. This will include information on the types of "in-service" programs in which faculty will participate, general areas of inclusion, etc.

3. The last and most important objective must be the measurement of need in the areas of

a) institutional needs

b) professional needs

c) personal needs

A quality FSD program will address these needs in such a manner that they overlap or become congruent in as

many areas as possible.

These often diverse needs should not be as three separate wheels going in separate directions, but as the wheels of a tricycle working together to accomplish a common task. The FSD committee can be seen as the driver of the tricycle in helping them to work together.

By knowing through a needs assessment the colleges needs and the personal and professional needs of the faculty and staff a FSD program can help weld together (through selected activities) organizational goals and individuals goals.

Other purposes and objectives may be needed at your college; however, no assessment should ever be used for promotion, retention, merit or other personnel action. A needs assessment is to be used only to know where we are and how to get to an attainable goal, not for any other reason.

2. Type of Document

The second of the seven steps is the selection of the type of instrument. It should, of course, be one which will allow us to meet our purpose and attain our objectives. There are many types available. I have grouped these into five broad areas. I have samples of each of these for each college if desired. I will give a very brief description, and pros and cons of each.

This instrument is designed to measure how much emphasis is currently placed on certain instructional concerns and how much emphasis should be made at your institution.

Each individual is asked to consider each item first as it "is" today related to the instructional programs. Next consider each item as it "should be" as the institution works toward "Improved instruction".

It is desirable that all involved with FSD should assist with the "is" and "should be" perceptions.

Advantages: 1. Gives quantifiable of the needs gap, 2. Fairly easy to answer, 3. Easy to score, 4. Gives good data for analysis and interpretation.

Disadvantages: 1. May cause some misunderstanding as to how to answer, 2. A score of say a difference of two does not tell us if the difference was between one and three, or between three and five.

B. Likert Scale

This is similar to the "is/should be" in that a scale is used, but has the individual respond only once to each item. The individual responds to each question by marking the appropriate column. The column heading may vary, but should have a minimum of the following:

Not familiar with item

Abilities acceptable at this time

Need some assistance

Critical need

Not applicable

A numbered scale can also be used with the lower number (zero or one) representing no need to the upper number (five-seven) representing critical need.

Advantages: 1. Easy to administer, 2. Easy to score, 3. Gives good information for data analysis.

Disadvantages: 1. Lack of solid definition of categories, i.e. what "critical need" is as opposed to "need some assistance",

2. Allows for individuals who have a need and not know it respond as to not having a need.

C. Faculty Job Description/Role

Description: In some institutions all staff members have a detailed job description, while in others, they have a delineated set of roles to which they subscribe. Whenever a person does not have the skills or competencies to fulfill a required role or a portion of the job description, a need is identified.

Advantages: For new staff members, whose skills are discussed in relation to the role of job expectations prior to joining the staff, this is an excellent vehicle for fostering immediate involvement in the professional development process. It has the further advantage of relating training and the need for training directly to the job itself.

Disadvantages: This method may be difficult to initiate for staff members already on the job. The method also assumes that there is a process for matching roles of job descriptions with specific competencies and evaluations of those competencies. Further, as mentioned previously, a mechanism must exist for transmitting any identified needs to those responsible for staff development.

D. Open Ended Questions

These ask faculty to give written responses to questions about areas of needs. The disadvantages of this outweigh the advantages.

Disadvantages: 1. It is difficult to tabulate responses, 2. It is time consuming both for the person responding and the person reading, 3. The rate of return will probably be lower than for any other survey because in general, people don't like to write and don't have time to do so.

Advantages: It does allow for individuals to be very specific about their needs.

E. Rank order of areas/categories of needs

This type asks individuals to rank areas in the order of their importance. This type can be done rather rapidly and gives a good overview of the order/preference of needs. However, it has to be kept fairly short so numbers do not become unwieldly. This therefore does not allow for the specificity of other surveys.

I believe that either the Is/Should Be or Liker Scale models are best suited to give the information that is needed. We used the latter and found the resulting data easy to use and to work with. We were able to rank order the seventy-three items by combining the percent marking the needs assistance and critical needs columns. This ranking was done for the consortium, each college and sub-groups (faculty, administration, non-teaching staff, staff) within the college.

This breakdown is essential if we are to provide activities addressed to the specific needs of each segment of the college.

3. Development of Instrument

A. Groups

Separate instruments should be developed for each segment/group of the college. How many and what groups must be determined by each college. We used the groups I just mentioned (administration, faculty, division chairmen/department heads, non-teaching professional staff, and classified staff). Some may want to even divide faculty by division. Many of the items were the same for each group, but the instruments were developed to try and gain the specific needs of each group.

By dividing the college into different specialized groups, a comparison can be made of the importance each group places on specific items. (i.e. administration placed a higher need on long-range planning than did faculty)

By knowing these areas of divergence, we can (1) direct programs only at those needing/wanting the, and (2) help bring about the goal congruence I mentioned earlier.

B. Areas of Questions

The items to be answered can best be evaluated if they are grouped into broad areas. Such areas might include:

Instructional Techniques

Learning Theory/Application

Student Needs/Characteristics

Management

Planning and Research

College Roles

Interpersonal Skills

It is not necessary to group together on the instrument, but to know which items measure need in what area.

By knowing which areas have the most need, it is easier to address that area. At Sumter Area Technical College we found out greatest need was in the areas of meeting student needs (i.e. advisement, student motivation, working with disadvantaged students, etc.). Seven of our top ten needs items were in this area. We, therefore, know we need a great deal of effort in this area.

C. Questions Dealing with Program Format

It is recommended that faculty/staff be surveyed as to their preference of when and how FSD activities should be offered. If

FSD activities are to be selected on a voluntary basis or to be attended with little hostility if required, it is wise to know when activities are preferred. Do faculty prefer a week-long workshop or the same offered over several weeks one day at a time. I realize that because of calendars, schedules, we cannot always provide the desired format, but it is helpful to know what is desired.

D. Ease of Completion

It is imperative, in designing a survey, that the directions be clear and straightforward and that the instrument be completed with minimal confusion. Nothing is so frustrating as a form that is too complicated to complete or one that has confusing directions.

In summary, in developing an instrument, three points should be kept in mind: 1. specialized questionnaires for different segments of the college; 2. group questions into broad categories for ease of grouping activities; and 3. include a section on the type or format of presentation (time, dates, length, etc.) that faculty/staff prefer.

4. Administration of the Instrument

Two questions dealing with the use of the instruments can best cover this area.

A. First, who should be asked to respond. In general, it is best to survey the entire college. In this manner everyone has an opportunity to have a say in the outcome. Total response will be lacking and a follow-up will be required to get the "late ones" to respond, but each person will have had the opportunity to respond.

In some cases, a random sample of faculty/staff may be used. If the college is very large or if time is of the essence, then a carefully done random sample should produce the same information. However, I do not recommend this process except for these reasons and time should not be of such urgency to require this method.

B. How do you get participation?

To quell suspicion--and there will be some, participation should be voluntary and with anonymity. This will help insure results. Also, a good formal (regular communication channels) and informal (lounge and office visits) explanation of the reasons for the survey with a request for honest answers will help.

A cover letter from the president explaining reasons for the survey and what is to be done with the information (again stress anonymity) should be sent with the survey.

Give a reasonable time for response (one/two weeks) and give a due date. Then send a letter of reminder. Again, formal and informal oral communications will be helpful.

5. Diagnosis of Data

It is recommended that a computer be used to analyze the data. If one is not available on your campus then a local company might be available to do the analysis. A rank order of the needs by college and sub-group is an essential report.

This allows one to know needs that can be addressed in a group effort through future activities; what can be college-wide activities and which activities should be specialized in nature. Also, we know where there are differences of opinion.

We also received a report giving percent and rank order for items by area of questions. As mentioned earlier, seven of the top ten items at Sumter delt with student characteristics.

6. Use of Results

Now that you've got the wealth of information, what do you do with it? This is not part of my task and is going to be handled in an expert manner by others. However, I would like to say that two things should be done (1) let the results be known, and (2) develop a plan of action to meet stated needs. The plan can be small or large, expensive or inexpensive, but whatever, develop a plan and carry it out.

7. Evaluation--of needs assessment, not program.

How do you know if the results are accurate and you've done a good job. Two points: 1. Use other information to reinforce what you've learned. Use some of the other techniques of interview, supervisory input, nominal group, etc. that were mentioned earlier. 2. Follow-up with shorter, more specific questionnaires. At Sumter Area Technical College, we took the top 20 college-wide needs and asked individuals to indicate areas in which they would participate. The results were very similar to the initial results.

In closing, once you have determined what the needs of the institution are, where the staff is, where you want them to be, where they want to be, and how they want (or don't want) to get there, you can begin to plan and design the necessary programs.

Needs assessment is simply a process of determining the difference between what exists and what is needed or desired. The tools for identifying this gap exist. Your task should be to utilize these tools to adapt and design a system for your institution which meets its unique needs and the characteristics of its students.

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